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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MTS AND EB/ESC/IEC  
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DOE FOR CUTLER/PI-32 AND NAKANO/PI-42  
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TAGS: [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [EPET](#) [ELAB](#) [ENRG](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [ID](#)  
SUBJECT: East Java: Mud Managers Informally Request USG Assistance

REF: JAKARTA 1038 (notal)

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¶1. This is an action request. See paragraph 11.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY. Following up on A/S Christopher Hill's recent inspection of the mudflow disaster, ConGen Surabaya met with Sidoarjo Mud Disaster Management Board (BPLS) leadership, who described their inability to formulate and implement a workable plan to stop the mudflow or manage the disaster. BPLS Director of Operations Sofian Hadi directly requested USG technical assistance, identifying five priority areas where additional outside expertise is needed to identify experts and information to help them analyze and manage the mudflow disaster. The BPLS identified the most pressing need as tectonic geologists and geophysicists to assess the possibility of a massive earthquake in the greater Surabaya region of East Java due to building tectonic pressure along the Watukosek fault line. BPLS internal models show the remaining area of Porong flooded with mud over the next 18 months, if conditions remain constant. To date, all efforts to stop or manipulate the mudflow have failed, prompting the request for fresh ideas on handling the disaster. END SUMMARY

#### Mudflow Disaster Background

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¶3. (SBU) The Mudflow disaster started as a gas well blowout 15 miles south of Surabaya, caused by errors of PT. Lapindo Brantas (Lapindo), a gas exploration company controlled by the Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie and family. Over the past 12 months, Lapindo made several ineffective efforts to stop the mudflow. Mismanagement, changing geological conditions and lack of funding stalled and eventually closed the best hopes of stopping the mudflow - relief wells - which could continue another 20-30 years. Lapindo has built an extensive earthen dam system to capture the 55 million cubic meters of mud already out of the well. Efforts to move the mud away from the densely populated and economically sensitive area failed due to the mud's dense viscosity. Mud flows at a steady 150,000 cubic meters per day. The mud covers 4 square miles at an average depth of 15 feet, destroying over 12,000 homes and businesses, and is projected to grow to 6 square miles by the end of 2007. Around 40-60,000 residents require permanent resettlement and 20-25,000 jobs have been lost. The main transportation route for the southern half of East Java to the Surabaya Port is permanently

closed. National road and rail service adjacent to the mud are frequently disrupted, causing major transportation delays and threatening closure of hundreds of factories. Water lines supplying 20% of Surabaya's water and fiber-optic telecom lines serving East Java, Bali and two eastern provinces run under the mud and are under threat from new water and methane geysers stemming from the mudflow.

#### BPLS Concerns Prompt Informal Request for Assistance

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14. (SBU) In a series of meetings with ConGen Surabaya over the last few weeks, BPLS Vice Chairman Hardi Prasetyo and BPLS Director of Operations Sofian Hadi described their inability to form a realistic, workable and effective plan for stopping or slowing the Lapindo mudflow and noted their increasing concerns over the environmental impact of dumping muddy water into the Madura Sea. They complained that there were too few competent geophysicists, mining and slurry engineers and environmental scientists and engineers to create and implement a workable mud management plan. They also lamented their lack of recent geological data which is hampering their ability to analyze the potential effectiveness of the various plans that have already been proposed. BPLS is seeking experts in these fields who might be willing to help analyze the data they do have and advise on what further information is needed to formulate a realistic response.

15. (SBU) In a June 15 meeting with Sofian Hadi and PT. Energi Mega Persada (Note: Energi Mega Persada is Lapindo's managing partner) S.V.P. Bambang Istadi, the BPLS again raised the issue of technical assistance and specifically asked whether the USG, whether through the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) or other USG or academic experts, could assist them in analyzing the mudflow disaster. They said that they would put these requests in writing if needed. BPLS identified the following problems/areas where specific technical expertise is needed:

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a) Earthquake analysis/prediction - Geologists with an expertise in tectonic geology.

There is evidence of increasing tectonic pressures in the fault line running through the mud, as evidenced by a recent spike in the mudflow rate and several new mud geysers popping up in areas outside of the dam structures. They are concerned that East Java could experience a massive, earthquake along the Watukosek fault line that runs from Mt. Arjuna, north through Lapindo, between Sidoarjo and Surabaya, through the Madura Strait and up in to Madura, devastating a densely populated area. (N.B. Apparently there is a geologist named Dan Hillman from Cal Tech working with the Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI), studying earthquakes in Sumatra whom they noted "predicted the Aceh quake.")

b) Modeling/Managing Pressuring Water Flow - Geophysicists with expertise in micro-seismic and micro-gravity measurement, tools and research.

The pressurized salt water reservoir (essentially an old pocket of trapped ocean) which is the source of the mudflow does not behave like an oil reservoir. There is no experience with dealing with this phenomenon and none of their oil reservoir assumptions is working to deal with the mudflow.

c) Mud Volcanoes - Experts on the origin, geology and management of mud volcanoes.

There are 7-8 mud volcanoes along the same fault line where the Lapindo disaster is located. (The others are all small and do not begin to approach the scope of the Lapindo site.) There are no domestic experts on mud volcano behavior.

d) Mud Content/Mechanics - Geochemists to help with analyzing and modeling the mud to predict its future composition and behavior.

They are having difficulty analyzing the composition of the mud and

are unable to predict its rapidly changing nature.

e) Geological Data - Experts with access to any existing geological satellite data and/or guidance on accessing improved data.

They have limited and/or poor quality geological data to base their modeling of the mudflow and future damage estimates.

16. (SBU) The problems described have a direct and immediate relevance to the health and safety of the remaining 50-60,000 residents of Porong and to the greater Surabaya area. Istadi presented two computer models; one projecting the surface behavior of the mud over the next 36 months and the other forecasting subsidence of the ground underneath the mud. These models have not been made public and are considered highly sensitive. BPLS predicts that the Porong area in its entirety may be buried in mud within the next 18-24 months, assuming a constant flow rate of 111,000 cubic meters per day and that the mud will breach the earth dams, overflow the Porong River banks and flow in an unstoppable manner directly into the river. The subsidence model was more startling, projecting the land in a two mile radius around Porong subsiding up to 1,000 feet and everything around the disaster getting sucked into a pit of hot mud. However, the models are based on old and incomplete geological data. The models will be used as a tool to help prepare BPLS evacuation plans for Porong.

17. (SBU) At the end of the meeting, Istadi stated, "Sofian Hadi is appointed by the President and speaks for the BPLS." We take this to mean that the assistance request was authorized to be made by BPLS leadership or at least broached with us in an informal manner to test the waters. Eventually the BPLS hopes that with enough people working on the mud issue, a solution will present itself and further devastation could be avoided.

#### Summary of Efforts to Stop or Control the Mudflow

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18. (SBU) Over the past year, a number of strategies to stop the mudflow have been attempted and many others in various stages of planning. After the original gas well blowout, Lapindo tried a snubbing unit and a sidetracking well both of which failed. Two

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relief wells were started using predominantly U.S. well control contractors. The relief well plan eventually failed because lack of funding stopped the wells from being put into operation. Lapindo dismissed the contractors and closed down the relief well project, stating publicly the project had failed for technical reasons. U.S. relief well contractors disputed the claim, stating that the relief wells would work if completed. The 396 concrete balls dropped in to the mouth of the volcano with the intention of plugging it were unsuccessful, as expected by most experts. In April 2007, U.S. relief well engineers were brought back to assess the likelihood of success of restarting the relief well project. According to contacts, political pressure from Bakrie put the relief wells on the back burner, due to the estimated cost of \$100 - 300 million each.

19. (SBU) The newest idea under consideration is a double steel walled coffer dam system. Tempo magazine reported that in a fit of frustration at a cabinet meeting over the lack of progress on stopping the mud, SBY ordered implementation of the Japanese designed system. Our BPLS contacts confirm they met with the designers of the system but are highly skeptical of the coffer dam, assessing a low likelihood of success and great risk of mud being forced through cracks in the earth and irreparably damaging sensitive infrastructure adjacent to the mud pond such as telecommunication, gas and water lines, the Porong Road and the national rail line. Vice President Kalla publicly rejected a Japanese offer to finance the coffer dam project for the GOI stating that Lapindo was financially responsible for all mud management activities.

110. (SBU) The inability to stop or slow the mudflow has prompted creation of a number of mud control schemes. The BPLS and the National Mud Disaster Management Team (Timnas) before it have devised pipelines, channels, pump systems, detention ponds,

irrigation channels, screw pumps and mud thinning systems to try to move the mud out of the earthen dam system away from densely populated Porong and the nearby critical infrastructure. The nature of the mud has defeated all efforts to manipulate it. Containing high levels of salt and sulphur, the mud is highly corrosive destroying pump systems. When water is added to thin the 225 degree mud, it cools the mud, which then solidifies and will not flow. The BPLS has recently begun pumping muddy water separated from the cooling mud solids into the Porong River. This is not considered a long term solution, as only 15-20% of the mud volume separates as water.

11. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: From our discussions, it is clear that the most immediate need is for impartial experts who can advise the BPLS. Post requests that the Department to reach out to the U.S.G.S. to determine what resources/interest it has, if any, to assist the BPLS in assessing its existing data and determining what additional data may be needed. In addition, BPLS would be interested in any recommendations regarding contact with leading public or private experts in the five priority areas, with tectonic geologists and geophysicists clearly the most urgent need.

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